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LETTER DATED 5 NOVEMBER 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to forward the attached press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea on 5 November 1999 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Haile MENKERIOS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Press release issued on 5 November 1999 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea

The status quo ante is the colonial boundaries

Overly enchanted with the term, the Ethiopian Government keeps harping on the imperative "of restoring the status quo ante" as a precondition for peace. This is either hypocritical or missing the whole point. The fact is that, despite its lip service, it is the Addis Ababa regime that has violated the status quo to provoke and trigger the war. In this respect, its invasion of Adi Murgu (Bada) in 1997 to dismantle the sovereign Eritrean administration, its issuance of a new, illegal map in October 1997 that slices large tracts of sovereign Eritrean territory in violation of the sanctity of colonial boundaries and its pattern of encroachment in the Badme area to occupy several Eritrean villages are all instances of naked aggression and the alteration of the stable status quo through illegal and forcible means.

As Eritrea has maintained from the beginning, the restoration of the status quo ante is nothing more than respect of, and a reversion to, the colonial boundaries that the Ethiopian regime has brazenly violated. The primary aim of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) peace package is to ensure respect of colonial boundaries - and hence restoration of the stable status quo ante - through demarcation. But Addis Ababa is obstructing this by refusing to contemplate demarcation of the boundary in accordance with inherited and sacrosanct colonial boundaries. A violation of this principle of international law will set a dangerous precedent for Ethiopia itself (its dispute with Somalia over the Ogaden) and open a Pandora's box in Africa.

Interim redeployment of the troops of both countries is not going to restore the status quo ante, as the regime in Addis Ababa insinuates. Redeployment does not, indeed, constitute the kernel of the solution and the Technical Arrangements do not contain "loopholes" in this or other aspects of the peace package.

As the Framework and Technical Arrangements clarify, redeployment of forces to areas that will be determined by the Neutral Commission is an interim measure that is necessary to create a conducive climate for demarcation. It is not, otherwise, confirmation of sovereignty of either country. Article 3 of the Technical Arrangements in fact states: "redeployment shall not prejudice the final status of the territories concerned, it being understood that this status will be determined at the end of the delimitation and demarcation process".

The OAU peace package has comprehensive and detailed provisions for restoring the status quo ante by securing the cessation of hostilities and the placement of a peacekeeping mission to monitor interim redeployment of troops so as to guarantee the demarcation of the boundary. This peace package is being held hostage because of the Ethiopian regime continues to obstruct it under this

or that redundant argument. The ball is thus in its court. If the regime in Addis Ababa continues to abuse the patience of the international community to frustrate peace and unleash war, it shall bear sole responsibility for all the consequences.